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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FROM APP ALEXANDRIA

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SUBJECT: EGYPT ELECTIONS ROUND 2: THE VIEW FROM ALEXANDRIA

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¶11. (SBU) Summary: Alexandria governorate, home to Egypt's second largest city, is among those voting in the second round of parliamentary polls November 20. Significant portions of the coastal city are considered strongholds of the Muslim Brotherhood. The ruling National Democratic Party did not fare well in the 2000 cycle, winning just six of twenty-two possible seats (though nine of the "independent" victors returned to NDP ranks shortly following the 2000 election). With a number of well-financed and well organized candidates, the NDP is betting it will fare better this time around. As elsewhere in Egypt, the MB appears the most effective opposition, with the recognized opposition parties coalition generally ineffective in generating popular enthusiasm as an alternative to the NDP or MB messages. Of particular interest are races in the Montaza and Raml districts, both MB strongholds, and a race in the Ghorbal district, where Coptic-Islamist tensions remain high in the aftermath of sectarian riots during Ramadan. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) Alexandrians join voters from seven other Egyptian governorates (Beheira, Gharbiyya, Qalyoubia, Fayyoum, Qena, Suez, and Ismailia) in the second round of parliamentary elections November 20. Once the home of a thriving expatriate community scarcely connected to the affairs of Cairo, Alexandria is known for an independent political streak that has in recent years manifested itself in increasingly strong support for the Muslim Brotherhood. NDP nominees fared poorly in Alexandria in the 2000 election cycle (winning just six of twenty-two possible seats), though nine of the victorious independents in that election subsequently joined the parliament as NDP representatives. This year, the election cycle has been energized by several cases of NDP infighting and Coptic-Muslim riots.

NDP Attempts to Avoid Repeat of 2000 Disappointment

¶13. (SBU) Of the ruling NDP's fifteen current deputies from Alexandria (out of 22 total seats), the party re-nominated just eight. A number of those overlooked by the NDP have decided to run anyway, as independents. NDP Alexandria Chairman Said Dakkak told Alexandria Principal Officer that the NDP nomination process for this election cycle was driven by the party-wide reform process begun in 2002 and led by Gamal Mubarak. The party sought strong (and/or well-financed) candidates for each of the twenty-two seats available, which meant in some cases casting off sitting MP's. The situation presents a number of cases whereby current and former NDP members may cancel each other's votes, potentially leaving the field to independents or the MB.

¶14. (SBU) One such example is in the Montaza district, where the NDP nominated University of Alexandria President (and former Chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee) Mohammad Abdellah instead of the party's current holder of the seat, MP Ali Seif, a prominent businessman. Seif declined to withdraw from the election and has brought his considerable resources to bear as an independent candidate. The district, which covers the eastern sector of the city including sprawling suburbs packed with low-income migrants from the countryside, is known as an MB stronghold (the current holder of the worker seat is an independent affiliated with the MB). Abdellah, who is a major figure in Alexandria and within the NDP, is rumored to have brokered a deal with the MB to divide the Professional and Worker seats in the district again between the NDP and MB (the MB declined to run a candidate for the Professional seat). But the battle between Seif and Abdellah opens the way for a possible victory of two MB "Worker" candidates. Given the stakes involved in this race, pitting an NDP heavyweight against the spurned, and well-financed current holder of the seat, with the possibility of the MB picking up both seats, Montaza will be an important result to watch.

¶15. (SBU) Elsewhere, the NDP has nominated a number of wealthy businessmen capable of self financing their own (and their "worker" co-nominees') campaigns, including Khalid Abu Ismael, Chairman of the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce, in Raml; Mohammad Mosilhi, a shipping magnate, in

Bab Sharq; and Khalid Abhed Khairy, Chairman of a large family business concern and son of the former NDP Chairman of Alexandria, in Attarine. Abu Ismael has battled allegations he is ineligible to win a seat in the heavily-MB Raml district by virtue of a rumored Palestinian-origin father (rumors he has denied); while Khairy has had to beat back allegations he is beholden to Israel due to one of his family businesses representing an Israeli shipping line.

16. (SBU) Overall, however, the NDP appears well organized and well financed and has realistic hopes of exceeding its disappointing 2000 result. Alexandria PO spoke with one NDP campaign worker designated as the "youth chairman" of the Sidi Gaber district. Her role has been to organize campaign activities in sporting establishments, youth clubs and other youth-oriented organizations. She described an apparently seamless organization of neighborhood, district and governorate reporting lines that tie her and her colleagues into the NDP leadership headed by Dakkak. In contrast, a Wafd candidate, who later withdrew from contention, told Alexandria PO he received no organizational or monetary support from the Wafd party for his campaign, but was told by party leaders that resources had been exhausted on the presidential campaign of Noman Gomaa. In an election-eve rally for campaign workers in Alexandria November 16 and broadcast on Dream TV, Gamal Mubarak urged party members to engage voters with a message that the NDP is the only party with a program for job growth and improved living standards, in contrast to the party of "darkness" (presumably the MB) and independents.

Casting a Vote for) or Against -- Sectarian Tension

17. (SBU) October's sectarian riots in Alexandria have been linked to the election campaign, and specifically to the candidacy of current (independent) MP Mohammad Badrasheeny for helping to stoke the Muslim riots outside St. George's Coptic Church in the Muhamram Bey district. Badrasheeny holds the Worker seat of the adjacent Ghorbal district and is alleged to have encouraged the disturbances as a means of appealing to Islamist-inclined voters at the expense of his NDP (and Coptic) opponent, Maher Khella. Khella withdrew his name from the election after the riots began, but the NDP rejected the withdrawal. The NDP's Dakkak told Alexandria PO that the district has been trending MB over the years. The results of this race, if reported fairly, may be an important indication of the public's feelings regarding the strife. A strong victory for Badrasheeny might indicate acceptance of his alleged activities; while a victory for Khella would indicate strong community rejection of them, given Ghorbal is majority Muslim.

Comment

18. (SBU) The NDP and defacto NDP independents will almost be the strongest performers on November 20, although the NDP's flat performance in the first stage of elections could affect its momentum in Alexandria. The MB, which currently holds four seats through nominal independents in Alexandria, has already doubled its representation in the People's Assembly with its strong showing in the first stage, and seems poised to increase its position in the Alexandria region as well. Left behind, as elsewhere, will likely be "established" opposition parties like the Wafd, Tagammu and Nasserists, who appear almost totally sidelined in Alexandria. End comment.

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